Chapter 6
Thinking It Through:
Using the ADAPT Strategy to Differentiate and Adapt Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The concept of differentiating and adapting instruction for all students, including students with disabilities, is explored in this chapter. Preservice teachers, upon exiting their teacher preparation programs, are expected to be fully developed and know how to differentiate instruction for diverse learners and adapt instruction for exceptional students who require more. However, the plethora of information on differentiation of instruction and adapting instruction can be overwhelming, leaving the preservice teacher overloaded. Concrete approaches must be available. This chapter presents the ADAPT strategy, which models one approach of organizing information and thinking through a process. With the use of lesson planning, universal design guidelines, and evidence-based practices, the chapter presents a step-by-step teaching model. Examples, work samples, and data derived from teaching the strategy to preservice teachers are included. This strategy may help preservice teachers, as well as more experienced teachers, approach the task of varying instruction in a consistent, thoughtful, and manageable way.

INTRODUCTION

Adapted instruction is the hallmark of good education and is essential for students with various learning needs, especially students with disabilities who are in inclusive settings (Breitfelder, 2008; Goddard, Goddard, & Kim, 2015; Janney & Snell, 2000). Without effective adaptations, these students are not able to access the curriculum,

the learning targets, or the knowledge they will need to be informed citizens (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Phillips, & Karns, 1995). As the number of students with disabilities in inclusive settings has increased, their representation in high-stakes assessments used to inform educational practices has also increased (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). These students and their families have become major stakeholders in a system that addresses their education in the least restrictive environment. This shift in paradigm is quite different from the historical perspective in which students with special needs were taught mostly in segregated classrooms, only exposed to specialized curriculum, and not considered an integral part of the school culture (Lee et al., 2006).

In addition, as classrooms have become more diverse, the need to address various learning modalities has grown apparent and essential (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Tomlinson, 2001). Diversity in the classroom has challenged the outdated model of teaching to the imaginary average student and the belief that all students in the classroom should be engaged in synchronous learning activities, or doing the same thing at the same time (Tomlinson, 2001). Differentiation of instruction compels the teaching community to provide varied strategies to address students of different ability levels, learning profiles, and interests (Tobin & McInnes, 2008). Thus, the importance of differentiating and adapting instruction has become a major theme and shift in mindset (Tomlinson, 2001).

Nonetheless, research shows that preservice teachers are not fully developed in the skill of differentiating and adapting instruction when they exit teacher preparation programs (Beyer & Davis, 2009; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Ko, 2012; Kurth & Keegan, 2012). For instance, a study by Dee (2011) found that early career teachers developed adaptations that were disconnected to lessons and difficult to implement and that did not address the needs of the learners. The adapted instruction was not connected to learner profiles or other information, such as the goals on the students' Individualized Education Program (IEP). Other studies concluded that veteran teachers were able to provide effective adaptations due to their classroom experiences and not due to preservice teacher preparation (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Scott, Vitale, & Masten, 1998).

To address the lack of preparedness of teachers to differentiate instruction, professional standards were set by several organizations such the Council for Exceptional Children and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with the mission to ensure that all teachers are well prepared. According to CCSSO (n.d.), this preparation ensures that every child in K–12 will be ready for college or a career. Standards such as those created by the Interstate Assessment and Support Consortium further detail these aspects and provide guidance to higher education (CCSSO, 2013). Other organizations such as The National Committee for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, now Council for the Accreditation of Educator

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